

## THE ABSENT YEARS OF 'PO' IN "KUNG FU PANDA 3" MOVIE:

### PSYCHOANALYTIC LITERARY CRITICISM

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*"Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it"*

- Proverbs 22:6 (NIV)

## ABSTRACT

This study aims at showing the correlation between the two early stages of childhood *development* of Po and the adult fixation that occurs at his present time; in addition, it is expected to give a deeper comprehensive understanding of how crucial the roles of parents in parenting during the childhood period. Having the data analyzed, a qualitative method was used to explain and describe the information collected which were related to psychological issues in the movie. The significant *cinematography*: camerawork in the movie, where the setting, plot, characters were described as the story is presented through moving pictures. Moreover, the theory of *psychoanalysis: stages of psychosexual development* by Sigmund Freud was used to explain the motives and behaviors of the character Po. As a result: **1)** Po's anxiety is triggered by his inadequate gratification of 'id' at the *oral* stage, making it difficult to control his dietary habit, pessimistic, dependent, and overly sensitive to rejection. **2)** The lack of parenting at the *anal* stage makes him manifest a lack of self-control, disorganized, messy and careless behaviors. **3)** Po eventually manages to gain his confidence; nevertheless, the *adult fixation* remains in him.

## INTRODUCTION

Kung Fu Panda 3 is a computer-animated martial arts comedy movie that premiered on January 16, 2016. This movie was a co-production between *Dreamworks Animation* and *Oriental Dreamworks* and was distributed by *20th Century Fox*. It is the third film of the Kung Fu Panda franchise. This film won the ASCAP Film and Television Music Awards (2017) and also was a nominee in other awards (e.g., Annie Awards in 2017). The film was directed by Jennifer Yuh Nelson and Alessandro Carloni. Besides, some famous voice actors and actresses were involved in the movie like Jack Black, Bryan Cranston, Dustin Hoffman, Angelina Jolie, Jackie Chan, Seth Rogen, and many more.

Po, the Dragon Warrior, is born in a farming village to his birth parents. But Po has been separated from his family since baby. He is eventually found by Mr. Ping, who adopts him, hopes for Po to inherit the family noodle shop some day. However, Po is more interested in Kung Fu, with his passion and enthusiasm, it leads him to be chosen as the Dragon Warrior. Since then, he begins to get trained under Master Shifu. Though clumsy and unaccepted at first, Po perseveres and fulfills the destiny of the Dragon Warrior by defeating Tai Lung and discerning the Dragon Scroll which is the ultimate Kung Fu

secret—"the key to limitless power". Proving himself as a hero to everyone, including himself. Po finally reunites with his long-missing biological father, Li. This revelation leads him to travel and discover the existence of a secret Panda Village. However, when the supernatural villain Kai defeats all the Kung Fu masters, Po must do the impossible, that is to train the whole villagers, full of Pandas and prepare to fight against Kai. In this sequel, the psychological issue can be seen from how he behaves correlated to the absent years of his childhood.

**Table 1**  
**Binary Opposition**

Past Cause "Stages of Development"	Present Effect "Adult Fixation"
<p><i>In order to mature into a well-functioning adult, one must progress sequentially through each of the aforementioned psychosexual stages. (Freud in Sarah E. Lantz; Sagarika Ray.)</i> Po lacks the primal parenting of both parents during the oral and anal stages of development.</p>	<p>Po lacks self-control. Whenever he is sad, he gorges on food. Po cannot really control himself especially when it's about food. That is why it made him have a bit of an oversized body.</p>
	<p><i>When libidinal drives are repressed or unable to be appropriately discharged, the child is left wanting and unsatisfied. Freud identified this dissatisfaction as fixation. Fixation at any stage would produce anxiety, persisting into adulthood as neurosis. (Freud in Sarah E. Lantz; Sagarika Ray.)</i> Po is a very dependent person to his stepfather, Mr. Ping. Whenever he is hungry or sad, he always depends on Mr. Ping to cook him food. The things that Po should already be able to do by himself, he is still relying on Mr. Ping to do those things for him. That is why it made Po messy and disorganized.</p>

## METHOD

The main character Po's psychological problems were mainly analyzed and criticized in the film using a qualitative method. Furthermore, two stages of *psychosexual development* and the *adult fixation* were explained by using the theory of Sigmund Freud. According to Freud, "*the id is the source of all psychic energy, making it a major component of personality.*" The 'id' is the primal and primitive drive that is brought at birth; it always craves for immediate gratification and lies in the unconscious mind. Freud believed, "the 'ego' develops from the 'id' and ensures that the *id's* impulses can be expressed in a way that is acceptable in the real world." The 'ego' is both conscious and preconscious which is another component of the psyche that is responsible for administering reality. Furthermore, Freud argued, "*the superego begins to emerge around the age of five that holds the moral standards and ideals we acquire from our parents and society (our sense of right and wrong).*" The 'superego' deals with ideal principles,



guidelines, rules, norms for making conduct judgments. A binary opposition is made to give the illustration of the character's conflicted psyche between Po's current and the past life. Freud divided the stages of psychosexual development into five stages: *oral* (0-18 months), *anal* (18 months - 3 years), *phallic* (3-6 years), *latency* (6-12 years), and *genital* (12+). He believed that the disruption within these stages will result in adult fixation. The camera works in the cinematography were also used to help analyze the intrinsic elements of the movie such as characters, settings and plot.

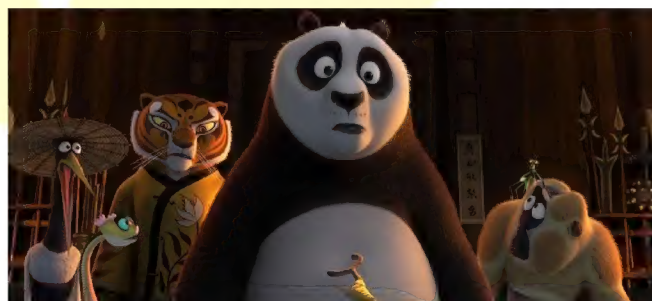
## DISCUSSION

This movie begins with the fight between Kai and Master Oogway in the spirit realm. Kai has a mission to collect every master's '*chi*' power. He eventually takes master Oogway's inner source of power by defeating him with the '*chi*' of the other masters. Master Oogway knows that he cannot defeat Kai by himself; it is why he surrenders, and says that it is never his destiny to stop Kai. Master Oogway



decides to send someone else to stop him, and he is Po, the dragon warrior. During the Mise-en-scène, the camera operates in all directions to illustrate the spirit realm and the interaction of the characters and the surrounding. It puts every detail of the action on display and the music makes the situation more intense.

In this scene, Master Shifu tells Po and his friends that it will be his last class. Every one of them is shocked, but what is more shocking is when master Shifu appoints Po as the dragon warrior to teach and train his friends. Po is so shocked that he shouts at his master and starts questioning him about his decisions. Po: "*What about Tigress? She's the one that is always telling everyone what to do*". His '*id*' is urging him to become the dragon warrior and be able to lead and train his friends. At the same time, his '*ego*' responds that he does not have the self-confidence and leadership skills. But his '*superego*' is forcing him to accept the responsibility of a dragon warrior that master Shifu has given him. Here, his '*id*', '*superego*', '*ego*' are conflicting with each other which leads to the conduct of defense mechanism '*rationalization*' telling him that he is not capable enough and does not have the skills,



and Po even suggests that Tigress can be the dragon warrior instead. In this scene, Po's expression is in extreme close-up mode to show how his anxiety is starting to rise. *In Confucianism tradition, a family holds the ideal principle of filial piety in which the relationship between fathers and sons extends to the relationship between ruler and subjects (Lam, 2016).* It means that in his tradition, a man is expected to be righteous and just; in his case, his friends are his family but he gives up his chance to be the dragon warrior instead of fighting for justice. In the same scene, the camera uses medium shots to show a close relationship between the two characters having a conversation between Po and Mr. Ping while he is taking a bath. Po: *"I thought that I would finally know who I was, If I'm not a dragon warrior then who am I?"*. From what Po says, it shows that Po is having anxiety about who he really is. He keeps questioning himself of what he can do or cannot do. This shows his 'id' that demands gratification of being able to know who he really is and what he is capable of doing. But his 'superego' responds that he cannot really do anything or have any skill. Then his 'ego' decides to find where he comes from and also his birth parents. So that he can find out his true identity. With the psyche conflict occurring, the defense mechanism from Po is 'displacement', by making an excuse to go find his birth parents and his village. In the second sequel, he just realizes that he is adopted when he is a baby.

Po cannot control himself while his anxiety rises; it makes him become confused about his identity. The fixated manifestation can be seen through his unconfident, sensitivity, and pessimistic point of view. These characteristics reflect his absent years of getting parenting from his biological parents who are supposed to teach him immediate and delayed gratification at the *oral* stage. Besides, his overreacting attitude shows more evidence of this problem. *"At the beginning stage, children are highly dependent on their mothers and derive pleasure from sucking and swallowing."* *"At anal stage, pleasure is gained from the expulsion and retention of feces."* (Freud, 296). He believed that the learning of receiving immediate and delayed gratification from parents during the *oral* phase is crucial to gain later healthy adult fixated personality. Meanwhile, having a problem during the *anal* phase 'expulsive' shows the fixated traits, such as: stubborn, lack self-control, messy, disorganized, and careless behaviors. In this case, parents are supposed to teach their child potty training to learn rules in toilet duties. In contrast, from the first sequel to the third, Mr. Ping, Po's foster father is busy with his noodle restaurant to earn a living.

In this scene, the camera shoots the two characters in a medium shot, showing Po is starting to question himself again while chatting with Tigress. Then, each of them is shot consecutively in close-up mode to reveal the personality of the character. She tells Po how she thinks that Po cannot defeat Kai because only a master of 'chi' can defeat him. Then Po responds with: *"Oh you sound just like master Shifu with the 'chi chi chi', there's 'chi', that 'chi', 'chi chi chi'! I am not a master of 'chi'. I don't know if I'm the dragon warrior. I don't even know if I'm a panda. I don't know who I am"*. At this moment, Po is



starting to give up on protecting the secret panda village that is about to be attacked by Kai. He cannot



believe in himself, because he cannot even know who he truly is. Po's 'id' responds with immediate gratification of being able to master 'chi'. While his 'superego' tells that he cannot master 'chi' and he will not be able to be the dragon warrior to protect the village. Po uses 'isolation of affect' as his defense mechanism. Where he is starting to

accept that he cannot do anything, that he does not have any skills, and that he cannot find his true identity. Again, this scene is evidence that shows the lack of parenting during the *oral* stages of development, with the result Po becomes pessimistic.

Having a discussion with Mr. Ping, the camera operates from above behind Po in *bird's eye view*, showing Po's strong will to go against Mr. Ping's order to stay instead of going to find and meet his birth

father in the secret panda village. Furthermore, it shows the distinction between both characters' appearance. In the middle of their adventure, Po asks his birth father for a lunch break. All of a sudden, Po finds Mr. Ping in his backpack. In this scene, Mr. Ping says, "I've raised Po for 20 years, before I finally told him he was adopted." This line from Mr. Ping shows us how Po



has been waiting to be dependent on Mr. Ping. Freud (2005:317) argued, "the early relationship between the child and the primary caregiver is crucial to the development of the self-concept, concepts of others, and the quality of relationships throughout life." This shows the effect from lack of parenting in the *oral* stage of development. Childhood stages of psychosexual development are prominent, lack of parenting from the *oral* phase can make an adult fixation, such as: overly dependent, gullible, and overly sensitive to rejection.

From Po's side, we can see that he is overly dependent on Mr. Ping, especially about his needs like food and packing stuff. Here, Po is portrayed as messy and disorganized, that is why he is still very dependent on Mr. Ping. This is the motive that leads Mr. Ping to come secretly with Po in his adventure in finding the secret panda village. Po's 'id' responds with immediate gratification of being able to handle himself, become mature, responsible, and independent. At the same time, his 'superego' tells that he still needs Mr. Ping to help him with his needs. Then his 'ego' eventually decides to go along with Mr. Ping in his adventure. With the psyche conflict occurring, Po uses 'denial' as his defense mechanism. He cannot accept the painful reality that he has to be a grown up and be responsible with his needs.

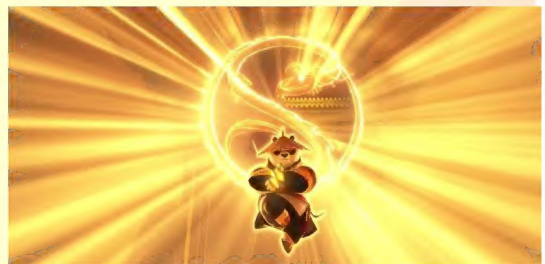
This scene is shown in a long shot to show the entire village and the interaction of the characters when Po, Mr. Ping, and Li Shan arrive at the secret panda village in the mountains. The village looks organized and well maintained. Every panda that lives there is organized too. This shows the contrast



between the living in his village and his behavior: messy, disorganized, and overly dependent. *“The earliest attachment of a baby is to the one that provides gratification to his oral needs, usually his mother (Freud in Sarah E. Lantz; Sagarika Ray). This is the evidence of how the children who grow up with the complete*

parenting and affection from both birth father and mother look well matured and mentally healthy. *“Toilet training is an especially sensitive task during this period. Negative evaluation from a caretaker if he fails to perform appropriately can manifest in anal retentiveness or anal expulsiveness (Freud in Sarah E. Lantz; Sagarika Ray). On the other hand, Po is adult fixated at the oral and anal stages of development due to the lack of parenting in the anal phase in terms of immediate and delayed gratification which can be obtained by the attentive care of both parents whose roles are distinctive: father’s role and mother’s role.*

In this scene, Po has a fight with Kai in the spirit realm. In this fight, Po also finally mastered ‘chi’. Po finally finds his true identity. In this scene, the camera occupies *Mise-en-scène* to show the entire action when he releases his ‘chi’. The chinese chi yin-yang dragon which can be symbolized dualism as harmony or peace between the negative and positive energy. This is the illustration of how the animated movie shows the invisible energy of the character in his contemplation reaching his inner potential. Although, he is eventually able to manage his psyche conflicts well and make peace with himself and both fathers; in the end, Po’s adult fixation remains still in him.



## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Po's anxiety is triggered by inadequate gratification of the 'id' at the oral and anal stage, making it difficult to control his eating habits, pessimistic, dependent, lack of self-confidence, and anxiety. The lack of parenting at the *anal* and *oral* stages makes him manifest a lack of self-control, disorganized, messy and careless behaviors. As a result: 1) Po’s anxiety is triggered by his inadequate gratification of 'id' at the *oral* stage, making it difficult to control his dietary habit, pessimistic,



dependent, and overly sensitive to rejection. **2)** The lack of parenting at the *anal* stage makes him manifest a lack of self-control, disorganized, messy and careless behaviors. **3)** Po eventually manages to gain his confidence, finds his true identity and has all his psyche conflicts resolved; however, his adult fixation at the oral and anal phases remain.

All in all, it can be concluded that the role of parenting during the early stages of development is prominent. Po is an example of a character who lacks parenting in his early stages of development. All of the five stages of psychosexual development should successfully be completed in order to be mature and mentally healthy. *“The psyche was like an iceberg, with most of it being below the level of consciousness. The tip of the iceberg, above the water, corresponds to what we can become aware of. We are aware of some aspects of ego and superego functioning, but the processes of the id are entirely within the unconscious” (Freud, 295).* The repressed childhood’s memory can affect adulthood; disruption to any of these stages may result in *oral receptive* (smoking, drinking alcohol, biting nails, overreacting) or *aggressive personality* (overly dependent, gullible, overly sensitive to rejection, hostile, verbally abusive, pessimistic, sarcastic; meanwhile, *anal retentive* (stingy, compulsive with cleanliness, perfection and overcontrolling or *anal repulsive* personality (lack of self-control, messy, disorganized, careless.

*“Yesterday is history, tomorrow is a mystery, and today is a gift... that's why they call it present”*

**- Master Oogway -**

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